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SUBJECT: Guangzhou's Bishop Not Optimistic about Future of Beijing-Vatican Relations

¶11. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶12. (C) "We should not be optimistic" about relations between the Vatican and Beijing, according to Bishop of Guangzhou Monsignor Gan Junqiu. During an hour-long private meeting March 14, Gan predicted to the French Consul General in Guangzhou -- who subsequently recounted the meeting to the Consul General -- that religious freedom in China would not be absolute, and that Beijing would continue its opposition to nominations of Catholic priests made by the Pope.

For Beijing, Not All Roads Lead to Rome

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¶13. (C) The Pope appointed Gan as Bishop of Guangzhou December 30, 2006, but the ceremony did not take place until December 4, 2007, nearly two weeks after the original date of November 21 approved by Beijing. Gan said that personal disagreements with China's official Patriotic Church over who would attend the ceremony and a letter from the Pope addressing the Christian community in China contributed to the delay. He also indirectly admitted that his oath of allegiance to the Pope could have been a factor complicating his nomination, according to the French diplomat. (Note: contemporary media reports suggested that a planned papal meeting with the Dalai Lama had derailed Gan's installment, the event receiving Beijing's blessing only after high-level talks with the Vatican and a subsequent public announcement that the Pope did not plan to meet with the Tibetan leader.)

A Blessing on Thy House (Church)

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¶14. (C) Gan said that groups of parishioners -- especially migrant workers who find the logistics of church attendance difficult to manage -- sometimes ask him for permission to hold mass themselves, to which he agrees under the condition that it be held discreetly. Because of this system, Gan said that there was essentially no underground network of Catholic congregations in his diocese. (Comment: Chinese authorities would likely view such small gatherings as problematic and "unauthorized," thus the need for discretion.)

Biographical Notes

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¶15. (SBU) The French Consul General assessed Gan, who was 44 at the time of the December ceremony, as "a person worth knowing," who is "very straight forward" and does not hide

his loyalty to the Pope. Gan's adopted non-Chinese name is Joseph.

¶6. (U) According to media reports, Bishop Gan Junqiu graduated from a Catholic seminary in Henan in 1982 and was ordained a priest in 1991. He was transferred to the Guangzhou diocese in 2002, where he is highly regarded by laymen and clergy alike.

GOLDBERG